



**RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION ON WOMEN**

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**Position Paper on Pay Equity**

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The Rhode Island Commission on Women (RICW) has historically supported the concept of equal pay and comparable worth. We support legislation to foster pay equity and fair pay at both the state and the national levels.

RICW urges the Governor and General Assembly to enact into state law anti-discrimination language to publicly espouse pay equity. The General Assembly has historically adopted resolutions to this effect, which we have supported. The Governor has also embraced pay equity through proclamations throughout his administration.

RICW asks the Governor and General Assembly to not only pass pay equity into law, but to provide the necessary financial budget to remedy current disparities, and to adopt a personnel system which reliably insures "equal pay for equal work". It is our understanding that the current Legislative Commission on Pay Equity has championed these ideals and we express our support for their efforts.

The Problem. One of the most profound inequities that women face is the well-documented difference in compensation between men and women, an inequity that can affect every facet of their lives. According to a report of the R.I. Legislative Study Commission on Pay Equity<sup>1</sup>, in FY 1996 the average woman working for the state in classified service earned \$4,269 less than the average male worker, a 14.5% inequity in compensation. Yet, there was less than five months' difference in average years in state service. In fact, in three of four pay quartiles, women had more years of state experience than did men. Yet, in each quartile, the average base pay and total pay were higher for men than for women.

The report also noted that in FY 1994, the state had 57 sex-stereotyped classifications. Of these 35 were dominated by women (including fiscal clerks, social caseworkers, registered nurses) and 22 by men (including corrections officers, motor equipment operators, laborers). Together, these classes accounted for over half the state workforce. If you were the typical woman in a sex-stereotyped

classification, you were nearly 7 years older and had a year more of state experience than the typical man. Yet, on average, he earned 21% more than you did (\$25,356 vs. \$21,038)!

Pay equity is a family issue, not "just" a woman's issue. As we approach the year 2000, most families depend on two paychecks to survive. If you are the "average" married man with a working wife and two children, your wife is earning the national average of 74 cents for every \$1 you earn, and your family income is only 174% of the 200% of wages it should be earning. And if your wife is Hispanic or African-American, she earns on average only 55 to 65 cents on the dollar. This situation is unfair to women, to men and to their children.

History. During 1984-1987, RICW's Employment Subcommittee, chaired by a state Human Resource Administrator, worked with the original Legislative Study Commission on Pay Equity chaired by Representative Maureen Maigret. The Commission resulted in a legislative endorsement of pay equity and a \$1M appropriation to the Department of Administration (DOA) to study comparable worth and identify classes and priorities for upgrades. The Legislature appropriated revenues to cover pay grade adjustments, and clerical, labor, custodial, nursing and other female-dominated classes were upgraded.

Several years later, RICW's Economic Equity Committee addressed the Legislative Women's Caucus and urged the creation of a second study commission. They were concerned that the wage gap was widening and greater monitoring was required to foster pay equity. This second Legislative Commission on Pay Equity, created in 1994, was co-chaired by Representative Suzanne Henseler and Senator Catherine Graziano. Some of their findings are presented above. In fact, they found the wage gap had widened from \$3,500 in 1985 to \$5,000 in 1995.

RICW has worked hard through its staff, Commissioners and Committee members to forge pay equity. Over the past years, we have supported and will continue to support the federal Economic Equity Act and the Fair Paycheck Act. We will keep informed and disseminate information about current efforts at the national level to adopt Fair Pay into federal law.

RICW supports pay equity because we believe economic self-sufficiency is a fundamental issue for all women, one that affects them individually, and affects the quality of life of their families – for a lifetime. With current compensation the basis for future pensions, an artificially low salary now can lead to an impoverished retirement in the future. We ask the state to remedy these inequities now, to build a better future for the women, men and children of Rhode Island.

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<sup>1</sup> This report of June 1996 was entitled "*Pay Equity in Public Service: What is the reality for Rhode Island's Classified Workforce?*" It was conducted by the Research Center in Business & Economics, University of Rhode Island, with RICW and the RI Legislative Study Commission on Pay Equity.